

NAEB

PRESIDENT'S MEMO

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTERS

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On a Personal Note

Like so many others, I too feel compelled to express something of my feelings about the death of President Kennedy.

Since so much has been said and written about him already, and expressed so much more eloquently than I could hope to do, this may seem rather needless and redundant. And yet, the fact that so many of us have this compulsion for personal expression is, in a way, a measure of the man we have lost. Something there was about the late President that made for a one-to-one relationship with thousands - even millions - of people everywhere, in this country and around the world. People quite literally thought of him as a personal friend. It did not matter that they had never met him or spoken to him; they knew him. In part this was a factor of the age of electronic communication which made the sound of his voice and his image a common experience in all our lives. But the media were only means of extending a magic that had to be present in a personality which retained its impact when transmitted through these devices. More likely this feeling of personal kinship he engendered was the result of his sensitivity to other people - a tribute to his understanding and sympathetic heart.

I, too, had this feeling of personal friendship; though, in fact, I had merely met him once and had seen him perhaps a dozen times in person. The meeting was the occasion of the signing at the White House of the ETV Facilities Act. About ten of us, looking solemn and dignified, were ushered into the President's office. He immediately arose and came around the desk to greet the Congressional members with a quip and a smile, calling them by their first name or nickname (Hello, Orin; Hi, Maggy). Everybody relaxed and opened up under the warmth of the President's easy manner and friendly informality. I was especially impressed with the fact that the President did not wait to be approached but came forward eagerly to greet everyone - including John Bystrom and myself, who were rather self-consciously

hanging back on the sidelines. Perceiving this, he strode toward us holding out his hand, accompanied by a warm smile and cordial hello. At this point a bevy of photographers were unleashed into the room and the President with much good-natured banter with Congressman Harris and Senator Magnuson "arranged" the pose. He then proceeded to sign the bill, utilizing a row of ceremonial pens arranged in a holder on his desk and employing each for a portion of his signature and handing it to one of those present as he did so. One of the pens marked THE PRESIDENT - THE WHITE HOUSE is now a proud possession of NAEB on my desk.

The signing of the ETV facilities legislation was the final act in a long series of events in a seven-year effort, but it was President Kennedy's administration that brought them to a successful conclusion. And as I watched the President sign, I recalled reading before the San Francisco NAEB convention the letter from the then Candidate Kennedy containing his pledge of assistance in the enactment of this legislation and his belief in its importance. "Since education is a matter of national concern, the Federal Government should assist in expediting and accelerating the use of television as a tested aid to education in the schools and colleges of the nation ... I wish it (NAEB) continued success in seeking to project the electronic media into the full usefulness of which they are capable in the service of American education and the welfare of our country."

Of course, his interest in supporting ETV was only a part of a general thrust by President Kennedy to develop a fuller intellectual and spiritual condition for our people and to foster the enrichment of life and culture in the United States. Certainly one of the enduring values that we have as a legacy from the Kennedy Administration is the elevation to a new level the recognition of the importance of culture and education to the pursuit of American ideals and national purpose.

For each of us the reaction to the President's death was personal; the action we take now must be, too. Walter Lippman once observed that "the final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and will to carry on." If each of us is resolved, in the President's words, "to make the full use of our powers along the lines of excellence" in accordance with the principles of decency and productivity which John F. Kennedy's life exemplified, his tragic death will not have been in vain.

And of the Future

It is clear from the start that the new President intends to carry on much of the program of President Kennedy. Eventually there will be changes certainly, for President Johnson is a man of strong convictions in his own right.

A story, which is not generally known, might be relevant at this point to indicate the new President's degree of interest in educational broadcasting.

On the eve of the hearings on the proposed ETV legislation before the House Commerce Committee, it became known that the Secretary of HEW (the agency proposed to administer the act) was to be the lead-off witness and intended to

testify against the legislation. This was in spite of the fact that the Senate had that very afternoon passed the measure and that the Chairman of the FCC had testified earlier in favor of the legislation in the Senate Commerce Committee hearings.

A call from Lyndon Johnson's office resulted in a colloquy at the White House at 10 o'clock that night involving Chairman Minow and Secretary Ribbicoff. The next morning, Chairman Harris opened the hearings by explaining that the Secretary of HEW had requested a postponement of his testimony.

Some months later when the statement from the Secretary's office was finally delivered, it reflected a 180 degree change and constituted a strong affirmative position.

Without LBJ's timely involvement at a critical point, it is quite possible that we might not now have a Federal program of ETV assistance.

-WGH

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